

The Fruits of Collaborative Visioning

Core Commitments and Soulful Finances



Capstone Year Output 3
Bachelors of Science in Integrative Ecosocial Design
Gaia University

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Output Specification

Welcome to Output 3 of the Capstone Year of my Bachelor's Degree with Gaia University. Of all the outputs I have written so far, this is the most formal, and also the most information dense. This output reports on a specific, clearly defined project, identifying the various design processes involved in that project, as well as offering suggestions for how to make use of some of the things I have learned in your own life. These two threads of design articulation and benefit to the reader are the main themes of the output.

In designing this Output, I followed these steps:

1. First thoughts: "what's on top?"
2. Goals and Intentions: "What are my goals for this output? What are my intentions?"
3. Expansion: "what were my projects in this OP cycle? What elements do I want to include? What elements do I need in order to fulfill the requirements? What kinds of aesthetic presentations will fulfill my goals and intentions? What technologies, formats, and layouts could be useful?"
4. Contraction: "Which specific elements, technologies, formats, and aesthetic styles will best meet my goals and the output packet requirements? What constraints, if any, do I want to apply to the creation of this output (i.e. no more than 2 hrs per day, finish by a certain time, stick to certain topics, etc...)?"
5. Design: "What will the finished output look like? What is its structure? What are my specific next steps? What elements do I need to create? What will my time frame and work schedule look like? What specific commitments am I making with myself in order to achieve this output?"
6. Implementation: Carrying out the plan laid out in design, reevaluating as necessary
7. Evaluation: Editing, filling out review forms, writing output process reflections

As always, much of the original design was changed during implementation, especially once I realized that I was 1000 words over the word count with several sections left to write. See page 2 of the appendices for the full text of my design process.

This document, the main body of the output, contains my Pathway Reflections, Project Report, and Output Process Reflections. The appendices, which you can download from the Mahara Page, contain Supporting Evidence, Learning Journal Extracts, and Design Processes, as well as extended text of some elements that did not fit in the main report. The Main Body is meant to be read in order, with the Appendices available for occasional reference.

Pathway Reflections



Re-visioning

In my LIPD, I identified long term visions for my lifetime and beyond and specific goals for this year. For this output, I examined how my thinking and visioning has changed since they were written. At the time of my LIPD, I was focused strongly on entrepreneurship and small business design. As my pathway unfolds, however, my energy has shifted towards the process of making a home. My long term goals now are grounding in community, having a family, and learning to care for myself and my family on a physical and emotional level. For more on my re-visioning process, see page 16 of the Appendices.

Pathway Redesign

My pathway has shifted significantly since I wrote my LIPD. At that time, I was choosing to focus most of my energy on the creation of Intima as an experiment in entrepreneurship and right livelihood. I was hoping to make a significant chunk of my income with that project, and eventually have it become my main source of livelihood. As of this writing, I am uncertain as to whether Intima will become my main livelihood. Although I enjoy the project and intend to continue with it, it is no longer my main focus. Especially now, during winter, I am choosing to focus my energy on grounding and learning how to live in community and on the land. I am wrestling with the question of whether Earthaven will be my permanent home, and I am envisioning and experimenting with creating the life I want for myself in this place.

Although I am still pursuing my learning in entrepreneurship, through co-teaching a course called the Art of Intimacy here at Earthaven, and possibly creating a nature connection program here for kids, my capstone thread will be the process of homemaking, and all the various skills that I will need to have the family and home life that are so

important to me.

Tracking My Progress

In my LIPD I proposed two tools for tracking my progress towards my learning goals, and I have checked in with these in each of my first three outputs. Those tools are:

- Learning Shapes (tracking development in a range of skillflexes)
- Course Syllabi (tracking books, courses, and other outside resources related to certain topics)

As my pathway shifts towards my new goal of homemaking, I will continue to use these tracking tools, but they will be tracking different content. In my next output, I will document the new topics and skillflexes that I am tracking.

Future Outputs

My next two outputs will each be focused on a particular aspect of my learning in homemaking. Some possible topics for those outputs include:

- The Art of Intimacy (co-teaching and in practice)
- Family Constellations Training (learning to facilitate healing in family systems)
- Time Management (living a full life joyfully)
- Having a Partner who has a Partner (and a baby)
- Choosing to Stay (how? when? why? where? here or in california?)
- Connection Styles (building relationships with people who are different from you)
- Men's Work (creating men's community, exploring the sacred masculine)

Project Report

Introduction

This report describes a project of collaborative visioning and design that I undertook with my friend Lily Ovadya. I learned a great deal about myself from engaging in this project, and also learned some powerful tools for preparing to engage in entrepreneurship and other world changing projects. This report focuses on the transformation in my relationship to commitment, and on my process of building consciousness about my finances and my relationship to money.

Project specification

At the beginning of December, I came together with Lily Ovadya to begin the process of envisioning and designing our collaboration in Intima (see the section entitled “Visioning with Lily” in my [Output 2](#) for more background). Lily was about to leave for that month, while I would be staying at Earthaven, so we decided to use that time apart to gain some clarity on how we wanted to work together, what each of us brought to the table, and what we wanted to create. Together, we designed a process that each of us would go through while we were apart, and that we would share with each other when she returned. That process involved several sub-projects. In this output, I report on two of those sub-projects; “Clarifying Questions”, and “Financial Analysis”. I also offer an exercise related to each sub-project.

Each of these sub-projects had its own design process, which is explained in detail in its section of the report. Although we did not clearly articulate it at the time, there was also a design process for the project as a whole. On reflecting on the process we used in that meeting, I have boiled it down to the following steps (for more explanation of these steps, see page 15 of the Appendices):

- What's alive right now?
- What is our intention or goal for this time?
- Holding space, waiting for something to arise
- Following the thread
- Creating an action plan

Clarifying Questions

This part of the project arose out of Lily and I expressing feelings of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty in regards to our future collaboration, particularly in relation to commitment. Together, we created a list of questions that we would each reflect on over the coming month, and share whatever we had learned from them when we came back

together.

Design Process

Again, the process of designing this project was not clearly articulated at the time. It followed a similar progression to the one above, starting with a goal and intention of coming to greater clarity, then holding the space for inspiration, then one of us suggesting the idea of a list of questions for reflection, and then creating a specific plan by proposing questions and writing them down. The final list of questions we came up with was as follows:

- What does commitment mean to me?
- What am I committed to?
- What are my perceived blockages to commitment?
- What would feel safe but edge pushing to commit to?
- In Intima, what do I want to offer, and what do I want to receive?
- What do I feel confident in offering now? By next fall, what do I want to feel confident in offering?
- What are my fears in working with Lily? What am I excited about?

Project Outcomes

The most notable outcome of this this project was my personal transformation around commitment. I have struggled with the idea of commitment in the past, and perceived myself as incapable or afraid of commitment in some way. Examining this resistance to commitment and reevaluating it has had a pervasive and powerful impact on my intimate relationships, my project work, and on my self-esteem.

In examining commitment, I started with a free write on the question of “what does commitment mean to me?” This is what I wrote:

“something I have to do, I said I would so now I have to, I don't wanna. A trap, a thing that holds me down, scary. That which I care about so much, I said I would and now I have to, disappointment, I'm disappointed in you, I fell through, don't commit so you won't disappoint anyone, especially you, if I just keep my distance, if I don't make any promises, it will be OK. Fear of commitment, it's a young male thing, I can't help it, I'm here now but I cant promise I'll always be here.”

In reading this, I discovered that I was defining commitment in a very limiting and inaccurate way, as “something I have to do, I said I would so now I have to”. By this definition, a commitment was a promise I had made, to myself or to someone else, and if I broke that promise, I would feel bad about myself. I don't like feeling bad about myself, and therefore was hesitant to make commitments for fear I wouldn't follow through with them. This seemed like a pretty limiting way to think about commitment, so I looked in the dictionary for other definitions. This is what I found:

Commit (from latin comittere, com- together, mittere- to send)

- 1) to give in charge or trust, deliver for safekeeping
- 2) to bind as by a promise,

pledge, engage (*Committed* to the struggle)

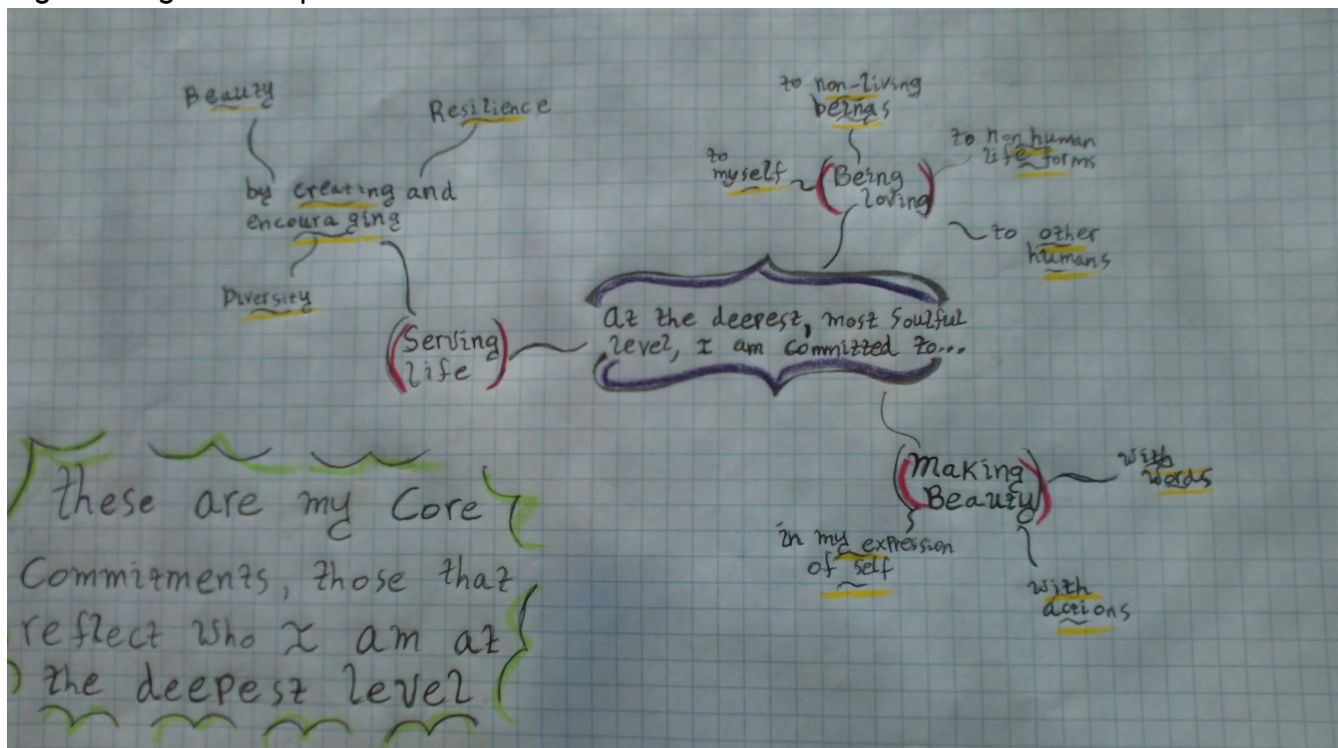
Commitment

- 1) a pledge or promise to do something
- 2) dedication to a long term course of action or engagement

My old way of defining commitment was similar to definition 1, "a pledge or promise to do something". Looking at the dictionary definitions, however, I thought about the way that Lynne Twist uses the word "commitment" in her book, "The Soul Of Money". In talking about how you can use money to express your soul, she talks about your deepest values and commitments, the things that you are committed to at a fundamental level, the things you care about the most. The second definition of commitment as "dedication to a long term course of action or engagement" seemed to resonate with this more soulful way of looking at commitment. Here's what I wrote in my journal:

"[the second] definition has a much more soulful feeling to it. It is about my values, what I deeply care about. It is not about...promises I have made to myself or others that I will feel guilty for not fulfilling. It's about who I am at my core, about what turns me on and makes me feel alive, about what enrages or saddens me and I want to see changed. It is connected to my instincts and emotions, embodied."

With this new way of thinking about commitment, I was able to wholeheartedly embrace the next question of "what am I committed to?". In answering this question, I gained great clarity about who I am and what is important to me. The things that I am committed to at the deepest level define me in a more meaningful way than my possessions, my income, or even more personal things such as my emotions and my behaviors. These are parts of myself that remain unchanged throughout the turbulence of my personal evolution. Having that solid ground to stand on is immensely valuable to me as I go through life's ups and downs.



Examining your own relationship with commitment (or anything else)

Many people struggle with commitment, as well as other big concepts in life such as trust, confidence, success, love, creativity, or family. Pick something from this list, or something similar, that has a charge for you, that feels difficult, frightening, frustrating, or hopeless. Now use the process that I used to examine your relationship with that concept, and shift it. It may help to read the learning journal excerpt on this process in the appendices for more details.

- Step one: Free write
 - Get a piece of paper and a pen and give yourself five minutes to write freely on the question “what does X mean to me?”
- Step two: Synthesize your personal definition
 - Look through your free write and identify, in a concise, clear statement, how you are defining this word, what it means to you right now. Notice if your definition is limiting you in some way, if it causes you to judge, condemn, or belittle yourself.
- Step three: Check your definition against others
 - Search for other definitions of this concept, in the dictionary, in articles, in movies or books.
- Step four: Find a deeper meaning
 - If possible, find a definition that resonates with you on a deeper level than the one you were holding before. Look for a definition that is empowering, one that is about who you are at the deepest level.
- Step five: Apply your new definition
 - Find a way to put your new definition into practice. For commitment, I started by asking myself, “what, at the deepest most soulful level, am I committed to?” Then, every time I choose to make a smaller commitment in my life, I ask myself “is this something I am committed to? Does it flow from my deepest commitments?”. In this way, I practice using the new definition of commitment, which changes the way that I think and feel about it.

Financial Analysis

In order to effectively collaborate on a business, both Lily and I felt that we needed to gain clarity on our financial situations. The state of our finances would have a major impact on how much time, energy, and money we could invest into this new business. For me, this was a frightening, yet empowering endeavor. I had never looked at my finances in this much depth before, and what I discovered was quite revealing.

Design Process

The design process that Lily and I used to create this assignment was quick and simple. We identified the need for more clarity around our finances, then moved on to creating the parameters for the assignment. We decided that we would each look at our income and spending over the course of the last year, look at our current financial

situation, including income, savings, and debt or obligations, and project our income and spending through the fall of this year.

My own design process for implementing the project was a little bit more complex. As is often the case with my projects, much of the design was done in implementation. I started by collecting the raw data from my bank records. I then thought about what I wanted to do with that data, how to organize it to get the information that I wanted. I was reading "The Soul of Money" at the time, and I was inspired to examine the flow of money in my life in relation to my deepest commitments and values (one of the main suggestions made in that book). With that goal in mind, I designed a table (downloadable from the Mahara Page) that would organize my financial data in such a way that I could see easily how money flowed into and out of my system during the past year, where it came from and where and to what uses I chose to put it. After creating and filling in this table, I looked at the numbers and wrote some reflections on the question "how did the flow of money in my life align with my deepest values and commitments?" I also created a table projecting my finances through the fall, and wrote some reflections on that experience. The steps in my design process were as follows:

- Collect information (the raw financial data)
- Identify goals ("analyze flow of money in relation to soul")
- Design further implementation (designing the charts)
 - What information do I have to work with?
 - What do I want to get out of that information?
 - How can I organize this information to get what I want out of it?
- Implement (creating the charts)
- Reflect

Project outcomes

The most tangible outcome from this project was the tables themselves. Having this information is useful to me because it allows me to plan, and to remain accountable to the plan that I have created. A less tangible, yet more far-reaching and transformational, outcome of this project is the impact it has had on my thinking about money and my financial situation. Before this project, I had never looked in depth at my finances, either by looking at my income and spending over the past or by planning for the future. I have made my financial decisions in the moment, living paycheck to paycheck and usually just barely scraping by, often with the generous assistance of my parents. I have been in school, and traveling, exploring the world and gaining valuable experiences, and this kind of financial consciousness has not felt necessary. At the same time, however, I have felt very resistant to and afraid of this kind of inquiry. I have always been resentful of the dominant role that money plays in our lives, and as a consequence I haven't wanted to look too closely at its role in my own life.

Reading "The Soul of Money" changed all that immensely. The main thesis of the book is that our relationship with money can be a source of profound personal transformation and fulfillment, rather than one of fear and anxiety. "money is a carrier of our intentions," writes the author, and can be a way that we express ourselves, what we

really care about and love. Looking at my relationship with money in this way was empowering, because it allowed me to see my efforts to earn and spend money as more than just a necessary but unfortunate part of living in the modern world. It allowed me to see the flow of money through my life as an opportunity to create, to give, and to do good in the world.

In deeply examining my finances for the first time, I had to come to terms with the fact that my current financial situation is not sustainable. In my projections for the next year, even at the highest of the high projections, I come out in the fall with less than 2,000 dollars saved, and no assured source of income for the fall and winter. In the lowest projections, there are times when I would have to restrict my spending to absolute necessities, or be unable to pay my bills. If any large unexpected expense were to arise, such as a medical emergency, I would be dependent on someone else to pay for it, and would accrue a lot of debt. I would also be unable to invest significantly in any large project. In order to live the life that I want to live, I am going to need to establish an income that will allow me to respond to unexpected situations and to create new projects, while still being able to care for my health and keep warm in the winter. While this prospect is frightening, it is also empowering, to face the reality of the situation and decide how I am going to address it.

Soulful Financial Analysis

What is your relationship to money? For most of us, it is painful and anxiety ridden. Money often feels like a heavy obligation and a curse, whether we have a lot of it or very little. So how can you start to transform your relationship with money? For me, the first step was to gain consciousness of the existing flow of money in my life.

- Step one: collect the data
 - Get as much info as you can about how money has come into and out of your life during the past year. I looked at my bank statements, and if you've kept records of cash transactions look at those too.
- Step two: organize the data
 - You can download the tables I used from the Mahara Page for this Output. Use these tables or design your own. I suggest organizing income and spending into categories, so you can see easily where your money comes from and goes.
- Step Three: identify your values and commitments
 - What is it that you most deeply care about? What kind of world do you want to live in? What are you committed to? You will need to ask and answer these questions in order to evaluate how your financial life matches those values.
- Step Four: reflect and recommit
 - Look at your tables of spending and income and ask yourself how they line up with your core values. If your patterns do not align with your deepest commitments, how can you make different choices with your money that better reflect what you really care about?

For much more about how to realign your relationship with money, read "The Soul of Money" by Lynne Twist.

Conclusion

These two experiences, examining my relationship with commitment and my relationship with money, have had a profound impact on my life. I am now committed, in the most soulful sense, to creating a livelihood for myself that will not only sustain me on a day to day basis, but will also allow me to embark on ambitious projects and prepare for unexpected circumstances. I am committed to establishing a livelihood that is deeply nourishing to me, and provides me with the comfort and security that I will need to truly give my gifts to the world.

Output Process Reflections

The most notable thing about his output process for me was the moment when I realized that I was about a thousand words over the word count, and still had about a quarter of the output left to write. As of now, the output is still about 500 words over, with tons of information in the appendices. It was a struggle to share all that I wanted to share in a manageable chunk. I was amazed at how much I had to say. This output came at a time of immense transition and movement in my life, with a new intimate relationship, pondering deep questions of home and family, and seeking to make a sustainable living. With all that going on, I found it hard to focus in on my project work and my pathway, yet I feel that I have created a useful and accessible output nonetheless.